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Conspiracy Theories Are Not Only for Election Losers.

Anti-system Parties and Conspiratorial Distrust in Poland

Abstract: Using data from a nationally representative survey in Poland, this study looks at the links between post-election attitudes, ideology and conspiratorial distrust toward public sphere. The reference point is an argument made by Joseph Uscinski and Joseph Parent. They provide evidence that conspiracy theories are more popular among election losers in the United States. Data presented in the article shows a limitation of the argument and the special role of anti-system party in the Polish parliamentary election of 2015. Therefore, the more comprehensive understanding of conspiracy theories within the field of political science is discussed.

Keywords: *conspiratorial distrust, conspiracy theory, anti-system party, election, political support, Poland*

Introduction

Post-election attitudes have become an established research problem within political science and political sociology circles in the last two decades. It is in fact a crucial topic since voters who experience electoral success and those who support defeated political parties have significantly different feelings and thoughts about the political system, as many findings suggest. Thus, election results might not only shape the political scene, but also have an impact on the legitimation of a regime, as well as garner support for radical change and other critical features of political culture in democratic states.

In their pioneering work, Christopher J. Anderson and Christine A. Guillory have shown that experience of an electoral loss has an impact on low political trust (1997). In another article, Anderson and Andrew LoTempio have made a point that "these findings also have implications for the stability and functioning of democratic institutions. Because people prefer winning over losing, the winners are less likely and the losers more likely to push for radical changes in the system" (2002, p. 349).

The attitudes of election winners and losers have been studied in many different political contexts and from various angles. For instance, the winner-loser gap has been observed in states with the varying types of electoral systems, the degree of democracy stability, bureaucracy quality, and electoral turnover (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Banduci & Karp, 2003; Chang et al., 2014; Esaiasson, 2011). In one of the latest works on this issue, Stefan Dahlberg and Jonas Linde focused on the durability of the effect of losing. Based on Swedish data, they demonstrated from a dynamic perspective that the experience of losing does not seem to be a temporary disappointment with the election outcome but rather a relatively long-lasting aspect of how voters regard the functioning of the democratic system" (2017, p. 638), which can last for almost the full electoral cycle.

Another aspect of post-electoral attitudes has been added by Joseph E. Uscinski and Joseph M. Parent, two American political scientists who proved that electoral losers tend to believe in conspiracy theories more than winners (2014). Moreover, in their book *American Conspiracy Theories*, using long-run content analysis data, they pointed out that the election outcome has an impact on the topics of conspiracy theories and the construction of a villain. "During Republican administrations, conspiracy theories targeting the right and capitalist parties averaged 34 percent of the conspiratorial allegations per year, while conspiracy theories targeting the left and communist averaged only 11 percent. During Democratic administrations, *mutatis mutandis*, conspiracy theories aimed at the right and capitalists dropped 25 points to 9 percent, while conspiracy theories aimed at the left and communists more than doubled to 27 percent. Who controls the White House invite conspiracy theories" (Uscinski & Parent, 2014, p. 140). This suggests that election results shape not only individual attitudes but also public discourse. Perhaps, it is one of the reasons, why the losing effect has such a durability, as discussed by Dahlberg and Linde (2017). The popular anti-governmental conspiracy theories bolster a lower level of trust among supporters of losing parties.

As we can see, Uscinski and Parent's findings on conspiracy theories confirm earlier research results as to the low degree of political trust among supporters of losing parties. This should come as no surprise since conspiracy theories are all about trust. Indeed, the belief that someone has a secret arrangement to usurp power and therefore violate established rights, is an expression of a deep lack of trust toward a given group. However, the "conspiracy theories are for losers" argument made by Uscinski and Parent (who explain that the term *losers* is used in a descriptive sense, not pejoratively (2014, p. 22), completely reaffirm that the winner-loser gap regarding trust goes against previous research on socio-political causes of conspiracy theorizing.

Richard Hofstadter, a prominent historian and pioneer of conspiracy theory research, strongly suggested that right-wingers are prone to conspiracy thinking. However, Hofstadter included a reservation that paranoid-type thinking is "not necessarily right-wing" (1996 [1964], p. 3). For many researchers and journalists, the association of right-wing ideology and conspiracy theory became a commonsensical claim, which does not have to be proven. Anti-Semitic conspiratorial stereotypes as well as the communist witch hunting of the

McCarthy era, are both associated with the right and have become the icons of political conspiracy thinking.

Nevertheless, there is a growing body of evidence that no specific ideological group is immune to conspiracy theory thinking and leftists are conspiracy theorists as well (Uscinski et al., 2015; Smallpage et al., 2017 Czech, 2015). As noted, Uscinski suggests that this is associated with the situational factor of losing the elections. Other authors demonstrate that the conspiratorial belief is correlated with radical ideologies – of both the left and right wing (Inglehart, 1987; van Prooijen et al., 2015; Korzeniowski, 2014). Van Prooijen and his colleagues' studies "revealed a quadratic relationship between strength of political ideology and conspiracy beliefs about various political issues. Moreover, participants' belief in simple political solutions to societal problems mediated conspiracy beliefs among both left- and right-wing extremists. (…). Our conclusion is that political extremism and conspiracy beliefs are strongly associated due to a highly structured thinking style that is aimed at making sense of societal events" (van Prooijen et al., 2015, p. 570)[1].

Summing up, there is available data supporting two political explanations of conspiratorial beliefs – situational (losing an election) and ideological (radicalism). Thus, the question of the relation between both factors emerge.

Problem

The argument, "conspiracy theories are for losers" is bold and throws new light on the issue, however the biggest problem in this approach is that Uscinski's claim is based only on American data. The plurality of voting systems with single-winner constituencies, which is in use in the U.S. parliamentary elections impacts political behavior in other ways than the majoritarian system popular in Europe and many other countries, or other more complex, hybrid voting systems.

For example, as Duverger's well-known law explains (Dunlavy & Divakar, 2013), single-winner constituencies often lead to a two-party system and it is much harder for populist, radical or anti-systemic parties to succeed than in a Party-list proportional representation and multi-party political system. Moreover, in the latter, the issue of political success is much more complex. The supporters of a radical party, which exceeded the election threshold for the first time might perceive this as being a huge success, even though it becomes only a small marginalized opposition party. Even if the objective success of an election remains a canonical indicator in political science, we should remember that at the end of the day, the subjective feeling of success or failure which leads to conspiracy thinking might mean

[1] The well-established correlation between political paranoia and RWA or right-wing authoritarianism should be seen as another case of a "radical argument" rather than "right wing argument". The name of this variable might be misleading, since we don't know precisely how high RWA is correlated to declaration of a right-wing view and voting for parties classified as right wing.

different things. As the above examples show, simple analogies cannot be made, and research of different political contexts is needed. The interesting starting point here is Poland with its Party-list proportional representation voting system and multi-party political system.

The secondary analysis of data gathered from a representative sample survey of Polish citizens from 2014 (Czech, 2015, p. 190–192) seems to confirm Uscinski's argument. Respondents supporting opposition parties tend to have a deeper internalized conspiratorial narrative scheme. However, it should be added, that the level of internalization varies considerably among supporters of different opposition parties. It is definitely higher among supporters of the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS), which takes a more radical, anti-consensual and anti-system position, than the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej – SLD). Therefore, the radical ideology argument also seems to be valid.

An interesting question emerged after the 2015 election, when PiS, with its anti-consensual stance, won the election by a landslide and became the first party in Poland after democratization in 1989 to win an absolute majority in both houses of Polish parliament[2]. It is a perfect opportunity to test Uscinski's argument. If he is right, the level of the popularity of conspiracy thinking among PiS supporters should drop below the level of all other parties. This would mean that situational factors determine the level of conspiratorial distrust, whereas ideologies or worldviews are irrelevant in principle.

The main problem we face here is following: does the level of conspiratorial distrust decrease among supporters of a winning anti-systemic party? One more question should be asked: does the level of conspiratorial distrust among supporters of a winning anti-systemic party decrease beyond that of the growing level of distrust supporters of consensual, moderate, not-radical parties? And, on the other hand, is the level of conspiratorial distrust among supporters of a winning anti-systemic party lower than among supporters of a losing anti-systemic parties?

From the beginning of my project my hypothesis has remained that the first answer is affirmative. The second is negative and the third is positive. In other words, my hypothesis is that the conspiratorial narrative scheme among supporters of the winning anti-systemic party decreases but is still higher than among the supporters of losing parties opposing radical change, and lower than among the supporters of other losing anti-systemic parties.

Operationalization

There are three key variables which are taken into account in this project: conspiratorial distrust toward the public sphere, the degree of the anti-systemic stance of parties, and the experience of electoral wining/losing.

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[2] It should be clarified, that in the 2015 election, PiS established a coalition of the United Right (Zjednoczona Prawica – ZP) with Solidary Poland (Solidarna Polska – SP) and Poland Together (Polska Razem – PR) and invited their candidates to join PiS's slate.

The conspiratorial distrust of voters toward the public sphere is in fact an expression of internalized conspiratorial narrative scheme and has many names in literature. The active and passive (re)production of particular conspiracy theories have been named as: conspiracy thinking (Grzesiak-Feldman, 2016), conspiracy beliefs (van Prooijen et al., 2015), political paranoia (Robin & Post, 1997; Korzeniowski, 2014), or paranoid style (Hofstadter, 1996). The general idea remains the same in all cases, but slight differences sometimes might occur among different approaches to studying conspiracy theory[3]. For this study it is important that the variable of conspiratorial distrust, contrary to the colloquial understanding of conspiracy theory, is not necessarily false and in many cases, we are not in position to tell whether it is true or not. Therefore, no one can say that, by definition, it is an unwarranted accusation without merit, which might be a sign of mental delusion. This is a commonly accepted assumption within the interdisciplinary field of conspiracy theory studies (Knight, 2000; Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Conspiratorial distrust is not just another term for any form of distrust. Conspiratorial distrust implies deep, long-term distrust toward the public sphere and as such, no matter if true or false, it has its social and political consequences and therefore should be studied. The growing number of people convinced that elites secretly and deliberately harm society is always an alarming signal of problems within the public sphere (Fenster, 2008).

In my research conspiratorial distrust toward public sphere was measured on a 7-items scale, where the score is based on the attitude toward the following statements: 1. Key information on crucial events in public sphere are intentionally hidden from the eyes of citizens; 2. Politicians, while making decisions, usually listen to powerful secret groups instead of the voice of citizens; 3. Seemingly accidental situations, such as economic crises, are in fact carefully planned; 4. Most corporations regularly break the law, corrupt authorities and fabricate documents in order to increase profits; 5. Most wars break out only because global corporations have a vested interest in it; 6. The most important political decisions in your country are accepted by agents of third countries' secret services; 7. There is one secret organization controlling everything that happens in world politics.

The number of statements the respondent agrees with indicates the level of internalization of a conspiratorial narrative scheme of distrust toward the public sphere. The internal consistency of the scale is acceptable ($\alpha = .76$). More information regarding the measurement will be delivered in the next section.

When it comes to the political parties' anti-system stance, I employ Giovani Sartori idea: "the hard core of the concept is singled out by noting that an anti-system opposition abides by a belief system that does not share the values of the political order within which it operates" (Sartori, 1976, p. 133). As Giovani Capoccia comments on Sartori, "a minimum common core [of the anti-system parties is] the delegitimizing impact on the regime of

[3] Review of different approaches to conspiracy theory might be found in the volume *Struktura teorii spiskowych. Antologia* edited by Franciszek Czech (2014).

the party's propaganda and actions" (Capoccia, 2002, p. 14). Capoccia emphasizes however, that this kind of relational anti-system stance does not necessarily mean the party has an anti-democratic stance. An anti-systemic party is understood as a broader phenomenon than revolutionary or anti-democratic parties. An anti-system party calls for a profound change which might be made in the name of true democracy. The parties' stance can adopt leftist or rightist ideological reference points, but it can also go across typical ideological divisions of the political scene as a more heterodox mixture of ideas. In such circumstances, a populist call to ordinary people against corrupt elites benefiting status quo might be employed. An anti-system party shares many analogies with a populist movement. Nevertheless, the letter seems to be more concerned with the elites and the system does not have to be changed in order to improve the political situation. As demonstrated by Bartłomiej Michalak, an anti-system party shares important similarities with the protest party. This is visible in their tendency to use "political anti-consensualism reduced to rejection of the state's policy" (Michalak, 2011, p. 113). Consequently, they are characterized by its distal spatial location of its electorate form than that of neighboring parties with low coalition potential (Michalak, 2011).

Among 8 Polish political parties which gained support of at least 1% of voters, the delegitimizing impact and other mentioned characteristics of anti-system parties can be tracked in four cases: PiS (38% of votes), Kukiz'15 (9%), Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic – Liberty and Hope (Koalicja Odnowy Rzeczypospolitej Wolność i Nadzieja – KORWiN; 5%) and Together (Razem; 4%). All of those parties heavily criticized the political order in Poland and called for a radical change. Moreover, all of those parties identify themselves as anti-systemic or are seen as such by experts and commentators. For example, in the Program Declaration of Together, one can read: "We set up TOGETHER because we have enough! We have enough temporary jobs and loans for 30 years. We have enough tax privileges for large corporations and banks. We have enough of the caste of politicians who do not know how ordinary people live" and claim that "different politics is possible" (Razem, 2018). Paweł Kukiz, the leader of the Kukiz'15, whose main ambition is to limit the role of political parties by introducing majoritarian system declared: "I am on the front of the war with the system for years and I will not give up" (Ścigaj, 2016). However, Janusz Korwin-Mikke, the leader of KORWiN argued that Kukiz, is "as much anti-system oriented as I am" (Wiśniewska, 2015). However, in a kind of commentary to this bidding, Jerzy Baczyński, the editor of "Polityka" magazine, concluded that "the most anti-systemic party is PiS" (Siek, 2015).

Of this group of anti-systemic parties, only PiS and Kukiz'15 exceeded the election threshold and won seats. Also, no features of anti-system party were coded in the case of four parties: Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska – PO; 24%), Modern by Ryszard Petru (Nowoczesna Ryszarda Petru – N; 8%), Polish People Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL; 5%), and coalition United Left (Zjednoczona Lewica – ZL) led by the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej – SLD; 8%). SLD is the only party in this

group which have not met the threshold[4]. To summarize, it is worth noting the success of anti-system political parties in 2015 elections. In total, they won over half of the votes[5].

In the literature on conspiracy theory, conspiratorial distrust is seen sometimes as a cause of populist, anti-system or radical ideologies (Czech, 2006). Conspiracy theory is portrayed as a vision of the world that leads to the adoption of radical ideologies. I do not challenge this model of causation but, in the discussed research, a theoretical model was adopted, in which the support of anti-system parties is an independent variable. It was a solution necessary to answer the research question regarding what is happening with the level of conspiratorial distrust among supporters of the anti-system parties. It can be said that the subject of the study is not an individual level, where conspiracy thinking leads to radical views, but a group level, where certain types of parties attract less suspicious electorate than others. In fact, the electorates rather than the individuals are studied here.

The third variable is electoral success. As I noted above, success might either be objective or subjective. Especially in a proportional multi-party system, success might be a complex issue. To make the procedure clear and comparable to Uscinski's research, the degree of electoral success is defined here in the same way as in his research: not the largest number of seats but becoming a ruling party (alone or in a coalition). From this standpoint, PiS was the overall winner of the 2015 election in Poland.

Data

This study relies on data from a November 2016 nationally representative survey of 1019 Polish citizens above the age of 18. As a reference point I use the nationally representative survey on 1003 Poles above the age of 15 from October 2014 (only answers of adult respondents above the age of 18, who have right to vote, were analyzed). In both surveys – the former was conducted by IPSOS and the latter by CBOS – the same 7 questions on conspiratorial distrust and on political preferences (among other) were asked. This enabled me to compare the level of distrust between supporters of different parties before and after the 2015 election. Nevertheless, I had to pay attention to some limitation of the data. Firstly, I did not have an opportunity to conduct panel research and track the same individuals before and after elections. Secondly, the latter survey was conducted almost exactly a year after the parlia-

[4] The case of ZL and SLD is complex. In the 2015 election, SLD became a member of the leftist coalition, which consist of several political parties and some, such as Your Movment (Twój Ruch – TR), have a more radical or anti-system standpoint than others. After all, as SLD was the leading member of the coalition and it was hard to find any delegitimizing tone in their program and rhetoric. It should be added that the threshold for coalitions in Poland is higher (8%) than for parties (5%) hence ZL with a result of 7,55% did not win any seats, while PSL gained 5,13% of the votes, won 16 mandates.

[5] More data and interpretation of the success of anti-system parties in 2015 elections can be found in *Oblicza kampanii wyborcych 2015 roku* edited by Paweł Borowiec, Małgorzata Kułakowska and Paweł Ścigaj (2016).

mentary election. In light of the above mentioned research of Dahlberg and Linde (2017) it seems to not be a serious problem and we can assume that the conspiratorial distrust is a long-lasting phenomenon. Nevertheless, the two above limitations mean that we cannot rule out that some of the respondents may have changed their party preferences within one year after the election. It is known that such a process took place to some extent and support for PiS increased after the election to over 40%. This brings us to the final limitation: the data reflects political preferences, not real electoral choices. Anyway, the data still enables us to learn more of the correlation between conspiratorial distrust and identification with a political party of a particular position and ideology.

Results

To see if the degree of conspiratorial distrust decrease among supporters of a winning anti-systemic party and decreases beyond the level of distrust among supporters of consensual, moderate parties, I start with a diachronic investigation of data from before and after the 2015 election. Figure 1 presents changes in average level of conspiratorial distrust (0–7 scale) among supporters of four well-established political parties which won seats in the 2011 election and took part in the 2015 election.

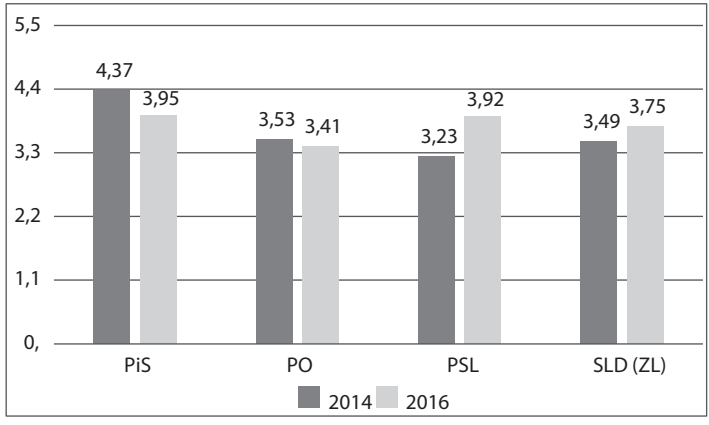

Figure 1. Changes in the average level of conspiratorial distrust (0–7 scale) among supporters of relatively well-established political parties

The first observation is that the level of conspiratorial distrust among supporters of anti-system PiS, significantly declined after the electoral success. However, it remained slightly higher than among supporters of the existing system and anti-subversive parties. The distrust rate dropped from 4,37 in 2014 to 3,95 in 2016 among PiS supporters and increased from 3,51 to 3,6 among the other three moderated parties. The gap between the

two types of parties diminished more than doubled from 0,86 to 0,35 after the electoral success of the anti-system party.

It is worth noting, that the biggest increase of conspiratorial distrust among backers of the existing political system took place in case of PSL. The case of SLD is not so obvious, since in 2015 they set up a leftist coalition (ZL) together with smaller and to some degree more critical toward existing system groups, such as the anticlerical Your Movment (Twój Ruch – TR). Consequently, the increase of conspiratorial distrust might have been triggered by an influx of more radical supporters as well as by the poor results in the 2015 election, where the ZL were not able to meet the 8% threshold for coalitions.

The most interesting observation is an unexpected decline of conspiratorial distrust among supporters of the defeated PO. It might only be a consequence of sampling error. Or, perhaps the most frustrated and disappointed liberal electorate voted for other parties. As the report of CBOS the opinion polling agency shows PO voters turned out to be the second most disloyal electorate (after PSL) and only 43% of their supporters from 2011 voted again for the same party. In comparison, 81% of PiS voters from 2011 voted again for this party (CBOS 2015).

To investigate the differences in level of conspiratorial distrust among supporters of the winning and losing anti-system parties in context of more moderate parties of defenders of the existing system, more detailed data are needed. Figure 2 presents the level of conspiratorial distrust among supporters of political parties in 2016.

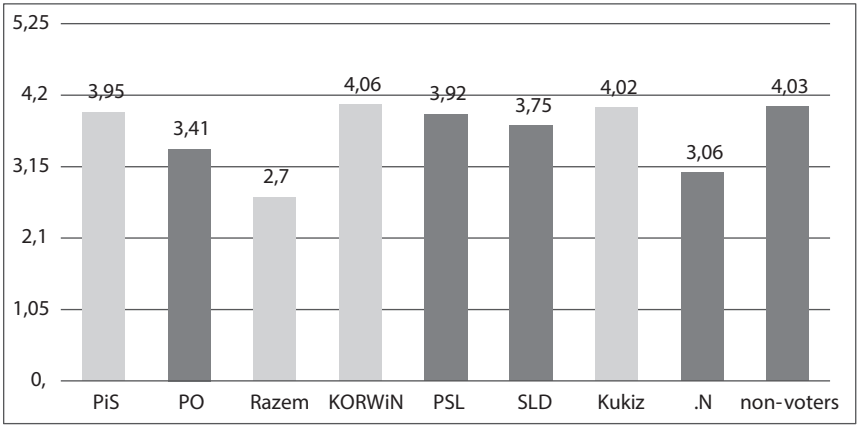

Figure 2. Level of conspiratorial distrust among supporters of political parties in 2016. (The lighter bars are used in case of anti-system parties)

As Shapiro-Wilk test has proven, the collected data do not have the features of normal distribution and arithmetic average is not the optimal way to describe it. Nevertheless, to make the data more accessible, I start with this most common tool of descriptive statistics.

The average conspiratorial distrust among all supporters of the losing parties is lower (x = 3.48, SD = 1.89) than among PiS supporters (x = 3.95, SD = 1.93). The average level of distrust among supporters of the *status quo* was lower (x = 3.35, SD = 1.84) than among voters of anti-systemic parties (x = 3.93, SD =1.94).

In the data under review there were no winners in elections coming from system parties, which means that the factor plan is incomplete. Consequently, it makes impossible to calculate the effects of the interaction. Thus, the analyzes were conducted separately for the electoral result factor and the type of party, and then the three subgroups were compared. To answer the question whether an electoral loss differentiates the level of conspiratorial distrust, intergroup comparisons were made using the Mann-Whitney U test (Table 1). The choice of the test resulted from the fact that there were evident discrepancies in results in the subgroups in relation to the normal distribution. Therefore, the basic assumption regarding analyzes on quantitative data was not fulfilled.

Table 1. Victory / failure in the election and the level of conspiratorial distrust

	Victory in the election (N = 260)		**Failure (N = 352)**			
	Mdn	*Mrang*	*Mdn*	*Mrang*	*U*	*p*
Level of conspiratorial distrust	4	332,93	4	286,98	38888,50	0,001

The analysis showed a statistically significant difference between the groups: U = 38888.50; p = 0.001. The electorate of parties that suffered defeat in the elections (Mdn = 4; Mrang = 286.98) were characterized by a lower level of distrust than the electorate of parties that won (Mdn = 4; Mrang = 332.93). The magnitude of the effect measured by the Glass rank biserial correlation coefficient (rg = 0.15) indicates a weak relationship between variables.

Another analysis checked whether system and anti-system parties were different in terms of the level of distrust (Table 2).

Table 2. System and anti-systemic parties and the level of distrust

	Anti-system Partry (N = 329)		**System party (N = 283)**			
	Mdn	*Mrang*	*Mdn*	*Mrang*	*U*	*p*
Level of conspiratorial distrust	4	330,90	3	278,13	38525,00	< 0,001

There was a statistically significant difference: U = 3885.00; p <0.001. The supporters of system parties (Mdn = 3; Mrang = 278,13) were characterized by a lower level of conspiratorial distrust than the electorate of anti-system parties (Mdn = 4; Mrang = 330,90). The Glass rank biserial correlation coefficient (rg = 0.17) indicates the weakness of the effect.

At the last stage of the analysis the supporters system and anti-system parties that failed in the elections and the electorate of winning anti-system party were compared. The Kruskal-Wallis H test was used (Table 4).

Table 3. The level of distrust in the compared groups

	I: system failure (N = 69)		**II: anti-system victory (N = 283)**		**III: anti-system failure (N = 260)**				
	Mdn	*Mrang*	*Mdn*	*Mrang*	*Mdn*	*Mrang*	*H(2)*	*p*	*Post-hoc*
Level of conspiratorial distrust	4	323,27	3	278,13	4	332,93	14,03	0,001	II < III

The analysis showed statistically significant differences in the level of conspiratorial distrust [H (2) = 14.03; p = 0.001]. Post hoc comparisons using the Dunn test indicated that supporters of the anti-system parties that won the election (Mdn = 4; Mrang = 332,93) were characterized by a significantly higher level of conspiratorial distrust than the electorate of system parties that failed in the elections (Mdn = 3; Mrang = 278.13) (p = 0.001, $\eta 2$ = 0.02).

Concluding Remarks

In the light of the findings, it might be said that Joseph Uscinski is right as long as we consider only traditional political parties. Conspiracy theories are for political losers and even more for supporters of anti-systemic parties. The results seem to confirm the initial hypothesis of the two-dimensional model in which electoral frustration and ideology have an impact on conspiratorial distrust. As expected, the level of conspiratorial distrust among supporters of the anti-system winning party declined after their electoral success but remained higher than among the protagonists of the status quo. This means that except for personality variables which would need to be studied in detail by social psychologists, ideological and situational factors have an impact on conspiracy thinking. A correlation between such political factors and believing conspiracy theories has been established.

On the theoretical level, Karl Popper, who is considered the Grand Old Man of conspiracy theory research, long ago pointed out that "happenings such as war, unemployment, poverty, shortages, which people as a rule dislike" (2013 [1945], p. 306) and bring about conspiratorial blaming. Now we see, that events which are relatively less important and not devastating for a society, such as an electoral defeat, shape conspiratorial distrust. On the other hand, it would be too simple to limit the problem to election losers. Political attitudes and ideologies seems to be relevant as well. Moreover, not only relatively rare radical and anti-democratic ideologies, as some previous research suggested (Korzeniowski, 2014; van Prooijen et al., 2015), can contribute to conspiratorial distrust. General discontent over the political system,

in its various forms, might be relevant, as well. The problem of the conspiratorial distrust cannot be limited to the radical fringes of society. In times of growing discontent with democratic procedures and institutions, embracing an attitude of conspiratorial distrust has become popular among unsatisfied democrats and critical citizens. This seems to be an important finding. However, more research in different political contexts, with more developed indicators and more sophisticated analysis are needed to confirm the above findings and penetrate the deeper political and social factors surrounding high distrust toward the public sphere.

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